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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000197

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SUBJECT: CHILD TRAFFICKING IN EASTERN MARITIME GUINEA

REF: CONAKRY 0090

1. (U) SUMMARY. The Prefect in Forecariah continues her efforts to combat child trafficking on the border with Sierra Leone, although her methods have drawn some criticism. Despite the increase in trafficking cases, not all officials in the region agree that child trafficking is a problem and some question whether the programs in Forecariah are appropriate for targeting "professional" traffickers. This cable is the second in a series of reports on child trafficking in Guinea. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) During a trip to Forecariah on May 7, Asst Poloff met with various local authorities and an orphanage to discuss the prevalence of child trafficking in the region. ASST POLOFF also had the opportunity to interview alleged victims of child trafficking and speak with a woman apprehended for reportedly attempting to sell her daughter.

PREFECT'S VIGILANCE NEW TO BORDER TOWNS

3. (U) Asst Poloff met with the Prefect of Forecariah Marie Guilavogui, to discuss the prevalence of child trafficking on Guinean's eastern maritime border with Sierra Leone. Having been trained by Save the Children and UNICEF, Guilavogui said she started various forward-thinking programs in the prefecture to combat child trafficking, such as creating "vigilant communities" on the border and training border officials to identify traffickers. She said the vigilant communities demand documentation for children crossing the border or pretend to be interested in purchasing a child to catch potential traffickers. The Prefect said that these vigilant communities are necessary because the under-staffed border security personnel cannot monitor the 104 kilometers of border with Sierra Leone. She also said she works closely with her counterpart in Sierra Leone to coordinate and share information.

4. (U) During a visit to a local orphanage that the Prefect established for victims of child trafficking, Asst Poloff saw forty children, eleven of which were allegedly victims of child trafficking. Asst Poloff met a five year old girl who had been reportedly kidnapped, drugged and taken across the border before her Sierra Leonean traffickers were apprehended. The orphanage director said the alleged traffickers have been transferred to Conakry for trial and the girl remains in the custody of the orphanage as the authorities try to locate her family. The director also said that some of orphanage staff are independently investigating where in Sierra Leone the children are being trafficked and for what reasons.

JUDICIAL CONCERNS

5. (SBU) The Prefect confided that her biggest obstacle in combating child trafficking is getting trials for those apprehended. She said

that in the 2007, authorities have arrested ten people for child trafficking in her prefecture, but that six of these people are still awaiting trial in prison. The Prefect said that alleged traffickers must be transferred to the Superior Court in Conakry for trial, which only holds trials twice a year, but often less frequently than that because of funding limitation or low caseloads. The Prefect said that transferring prisoners to Conakry is very costly and increases the risk of prisoners escaping.

16. (U) Asst Poloff also met with the senior Judge in Forecariah, Mohamed Saed Job, who clarified that because child trafficking is considered a serious crime (minimum of 5 years in prison), those convicted must be tried by the Cour D'Assises (Superior Court) in Conakry. Mr. Job said that someone charged with child trafficking could wait six months or longer before being transported and tried in Conakry. He said that the Justice Branch and police unit in Forecariah hold initial investigations to ensure that there is adequate evidence against the alleged trafficker. Asst Poloff asked whether they have released an alleged trafficker because of insufficient evidence. The judge answered by saying that trafficking cases are new in Forecariah, and he has seen only three cases, and all were sent to Conakry for trial.

WOMAN ALLEGEDLY TRIED TO SELL DAUGHTER

17. (SBU) The day before Asst Poloff arrived in Forecariah, a woman and her male accomplice were apprehended on the border for allegedly trying to sell her daughter. The Prefect invited Asst Poloff to interview the woman, who was from Conakry, her 15 year old daughter, and a male accomplice. According to the woman, she was taking her

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daughter to a village town near the border to get medicine to treat her daughter's "theft problem." She said she was going to see a witch doctor that could help her daughter stop stealing. According to the Prefect, one of the community members, who had been trained through prefectural programs to increase vigilance, asked the mother how much she wanted to sell her daughter for and when the mother began negotiating a price, the local community arrested her. The mother said she was only joking and did not really intend to sell her daughter. The Prefect said that the 15 year old girl first said her mother was trying to sell her, but later changed her tune when she realized that her mother could be thrown in prison. When Asst Poloff interviewed the girl alone, the girl said her mother was not trying to sell her and while her mother had joked about selling previously, the girl did not think her mother would do it.

18. (SBU) While Asst Poloff was in Forecariah, Radio Libertaire, a private radio station, was also conducting interviews regarding the mother who allegedly tried to sell her daughter on the border. The radio station interviewed the Prefect and the director of the orphanage as they gathered information about the incident. The Prefect mentioned to Asst Poloff that her orphanage has received a great deal of press over recent child trafficking incidents in Forecariah.

POLICE COMMISSIONER: TRAFFICKING NOT A PROBLEM

19. (SBU) Asst Poloff also met privately with the police commissioner Ibrahima Sory Sylla. Mr. Sylla said that he has been police commissioner in Forecariah for about six months. He said that in his time as police commissioner he had only seen one legitimate case of child trafficking. Mr. Sylla said that "Child trafficking is not a problem here. Trafficking is a perception, not a threat or a reality." He said that most of the children of the orphanage are from poor or broken families and are not victims of trafficking. Mr. Sylla also commented on the woman who was apprehended for allegedly trafficking ten children to Sierra Leone last year (REFTEL). He said that the woman recently came to the police station to pick up her identification card and told him that all ten children are now in English schools in Sierra Leone.

¶10. (SBU) Mr. Sylla also commented on the new case of the woman who allegedly tried to sell her daughter. He said that technically speaking, it is not a case of trafficking because her intent was to get the girl medicine from a doctor, not to sell her. Mr. Sylla told Asst Poloff that after the police investigation, the authorities would most likely release her. The police commissioner said there is an important distinction between real traffickers and people who are willing to exchange their child for a large sum of money. He said that "professional traffickers use drugs and force to traffic children."

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) This cable represents a continuation of Embassy efforts to understand child trafficking issues in Guinea. Embassy reporting over the last year on this region suggests that Guinea's eastern maritime border is a major transit point for trafficking children from Guinea to Sierra Leone. However, there has been no indication that children are being trafficked in the opposite direction, i.e. from Sierra Leone into Guinea. Although the Prefect has implemented a targeted program to address child trafficking issues, institutional resistance suggests that her message is not penetrating the ranks. She seems sincere in her intentions, but some of the Prefect's tactics could back-fire. Encouraging increased vigilance among average citizens could create an environment that condones vigilante justice. END COMMENT
CARTER